

Through the New England Secure Milk Supply (SMS) Project, the six states in the region are working to improve prospects for dairies in a disaster, such as an outbreak of a dangerous livestock disease.

Background

Since 2010, federal and state agricultural agencies have been reassessing risks and revising plans, with an emphasis on sustaining dairy operations in an emergency, keeping producers and processors in business and the food supply chain intact.

This project was developed by the New England Animal Agricultural Security Alliance (NESAASA, chartered by the six state governors), with the support of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The project has also greatly benefited from the support of dairy producers, co-ops, haulers, and processors in the region.

Current preparations stress improving their capacity to survive Foot-and-Mouth Disease.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD)

Fortunately, U.S. efforts to remain free of FMD have been extraordinarily successful. The last U.S. outbreak was in 1929. Although FMD does not pose a significant risk to human health, the disease remains the most contagious of all diseases for susceptible animals, and it is endemic in the vast majority of the world. Cattle and hogs are particularly vulnerable.

Given the global movement of goods and services, changes in the virus (FMDv), its potential value as a terrorist weapon, and recent outbreaks among U.S. trading partners, the key question for emergency managers has changed from "IF FMD breaks in the U.S. . . ." to "WHEN it breaks, HOW can we minimize the damage?"

In particular, in this project, dairy stakeholders are preparing to keep milk moving from farm to processor and consumer, even when FMD breaks in the U.S.

FMD Response

Standards of veterinary medicine as well international trade agreements require that responders aim to return to a FMD-free status as quickly as possible. Response plans are supposed to minimize threats to human public health, environmental quality, animal welfare, international trade, domestic food, fiber, and tourist enterprises, and cost to taxpayers. In practice, these aims can conflict. Protocols that decrease one threat can increase another.

For example, among the first principles of a response to highly contagious or zoonotic disease (FAD) is to halt traffic to and from the site of infection. That is among the reasons State Veterinarians or Commissioners of Agriculture are empowered to stop livestock movement. When an FAD such as Foot-and-Mouth Disease is under investigation anywhere in the U.S., these officials are apt to "err on the safe side" by fortifying state lines.

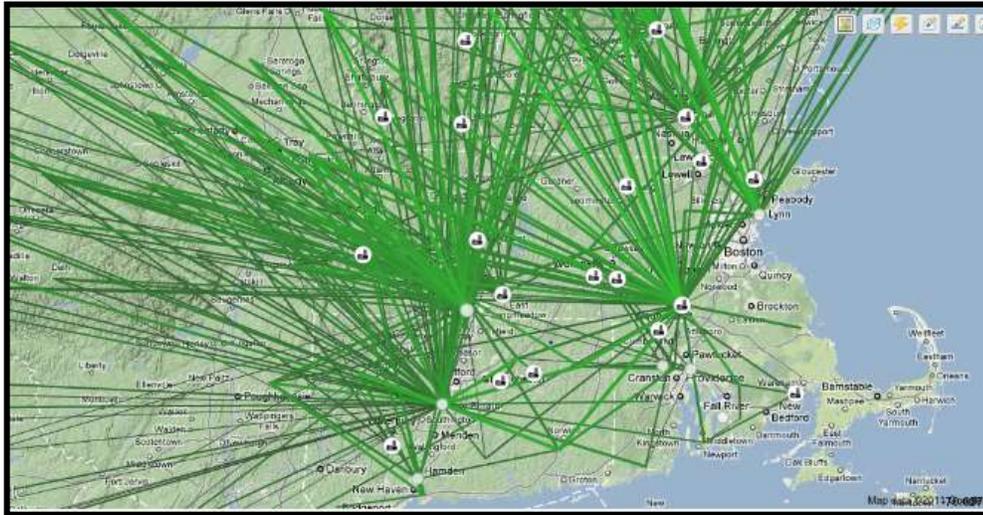
Stopping the movement of all potentially contaminated animals, animal products, vehicles, clothing, and other fomites can, in fact, prevent the spread of disease. But for a dairy farm, the "safe side" is hardly safe. Even a one-day interruption in farm traffic could threaten that farm's very existence as well as the welfare of its animals and increase costs to associated businesses, nutritional resources, environmental protections, and the public treasury. Milk is

so perishable and so dependent on transport that isolation from FMD infection can be even tougher on dairies and consumers than the disease itself.

Regional Initiative

In the case of New England, risks to dairies are particularly acute because state lines – those readily authorized barriers to the movement of farm products – are extraordinarily close together. Every day, tankers move milk from farms in one state to processors in another. In fact, in New England only about half of the market for dairy producers (55%) and an even smaller share of the supply for processors (44%) are located in the same state.

Regular Routes from Dairy Farm to Processing Plant in New England:



Halting interstate traffic (e.g., to ward off distant infection) risks transforming milk on a disease-free farm from a source of sustenance to a stream of potentially harmful waste. Such a proactive measure can yield little benefit for disease prevention and huge costs to dairy survival.

The six New England states are therefore preparing to respond as a single region, to adjust the bounds of movement controls and increase biosecurity preparations to minimize both risks of contagion and threats to business continuity. Regionalization also reduces the challenge, duplication, and cost of state-border controls.

Next Steps

This approach aims to help dairy stakeholders implement existing emergency response plans while – insofar as possible, safely, simultaneously – permitting movement that is essential for dairy farms, processors, and consumers.

Each of the New England states is currently working to update, standardize and integrate information on communications and the capacities of dairy operations to respond to a FMD outbreak.

For more information, visit the [National SMS Project](#) and the [New England SMS Project](#).